National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

The precautionary principle in environmental regulations for drinking water

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Abstract:

The precautionary principle has been proposed as a means of providing increased safety for consumers of drinking water. While the principle has received increased attention over the past 2 decades, it remains rather poorly defined both in law and practice. Hence, the implications for application in risk-based decisions on water quality are not fully developed. This paper examines a series of philosophical, practical and decision-theoretic issues related to the application of the principle in such decisions, highlighting areas where at least the intent of the principle is already well embedded in environmental regulation through margins of safety, and identifying residual issues. A conclusion is drawn that full application of the principle may be driven forward both by programmes such as REACH in the EU, and by the emerging Water Framework Directive and multi-stakeholder approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Policymaker

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Food/Water Quality

Food/Water Quality: Chemical

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Freshwater

Geographic Location: ☑

resource focuses on specific location

☐ Global or Unspecified

Health Impact: ☑

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

☐ Health Outcome Unspecified

Mitigation/Adaptation: ☑

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

☐ Adaptation

Resource Type: ☑

format or standard characteristic of resource

☐ Review

Timescale: ☑

time period studied

☐ Time Scale Unspecified